Letter from Taizé

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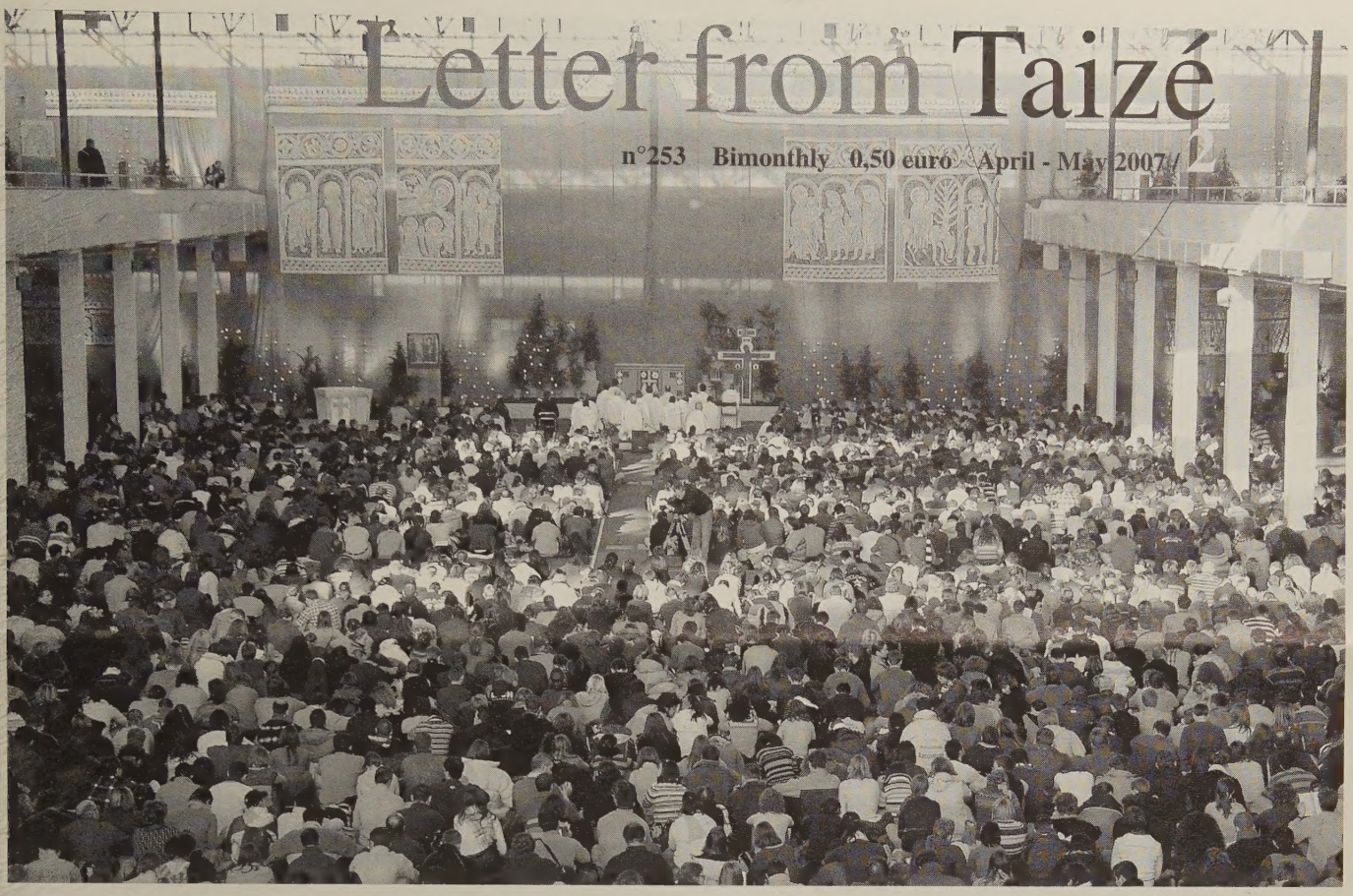

Common Prayer and Welcome (p. 2) in Zagreb

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LETTER FROM KOLKATA

Attentiveness to God, respect for human beings

Throughout the year 2007, the *Letter from Taizé* will continue the reflection begun by Brother Alois in his *Letter from Kolkata*.

The first pages will treat each part of the *Letter from Kolkata* successively, starting from three questions:

What experiences of Church does this part of the Letter reflect?

How was it put into practice during the meetings in Taizé or during recent stages of the pilgrimage of trust?

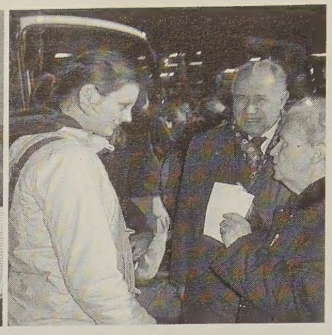
What inspiration does it offer for the future?

On page 8, the portrait of a witness to faith mentioned in the *Letter from Kolkata* enables us to go further with an inner search.

Attentiveness to God, respect for human beings. The Letter interweaves these two themes throughout its pages. Here we will recall a few phrases from the first part:

> **In India, as in other parts of Asia, we have discovered how much the quite natural attention paid to the presence of God in the whole of creation implies respect for the other person and what is sacred for him or her.**

The European meeting in Zagreb was an opportunity to discover that in Europe, too, there are ways to live that include a natural attentiveness to the presence of God. The Croatian people are a good example of this. The brothers in charge of the welcome of the French wrote these lines to thank the young people who prepared the buses for Zagreb and to encourage them for the future: "What remains present to us about the meeting in Zagreb? Perhaps some of the qualities of the Croats that we could integrate into our identity as believers in France. We can keep one thing particularly in mind: their attentiveness to the presence of God in daily life. We live in a



different context, of course. The infinite respect we have for the non-believers who are all around us naturally invites us not to impose our faith on those who have no access to it. And yet, how can we be careful not to put the lamp of faith under a bushel? What tiny acts in daily life can we invent so that our faith can breathe, so that it can be creative and not cause us embarrassment when a friend or relative happens to discover that we believe in God? The Croats have received beautiful practices from their tradition: blessing children before going to bed or before they leave for school, making the sign of the cross when passing a church, praying before getting in the car and driving somewhere, singing before every Church meeting, blessing people's homes... It is up to us, in our situation, to rediscover, to adapt and even to invent such signs. Far from putting pressure on others, they will reflect better than any discussions or arguments that the radical option of our lives is love and concern for others."

Today, in modern societies, it is so important to reawaken that attentiveness to God and that respect for human beings.

In Italy

Barbara from Pesaro wrote to a brother: "We have a regular prayer once a month. It started maybe seven years ago and we were just two people, but we have never missed a single month. We are now a larger group and we have always met at Francesco's house. We have talked about moving to a church but the whole group preferred the warmth of a house, and we would like that house to be open to everyone who would like to join us. You wouldn't believe it if I tell you that we have no fixed date. We have been trying to find a date for ages, but without success. And it still has gone on continuously for years and years without missing a single month!"

In Kolkata, Christians are a minority among the other great historical religions. In India, tensions between religions have sometimes led to serious violence. And yet, mutual respect represents the essence of the relationship between religions. The feasts of each tradition are respected by the others and can even become an occasion for sharing.

In the Paris area,

a priest, Father Vincent Scheffels, lives in a very cosmopolitan district, marked by difficulties between different immigrant communities. Last year, during a workshop at the Milan meeting, he presented the cook-book he published with the women of the neighborhood. Starting from the awareness that cooking touches the profound identity of a culture, he suggested to a few women that they meet to learn recipes from one another and in this way to go beyond prejudices between different groups. The book grew out of that experience.

As we continue the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" that brings together young people from many countries, we understand more and more deeply this reality: all humanity forms a single family and God lives within every human being without exception. (...) If Christ sends us to the ends of the earth to communicate God's love, this takes place above all through a dialogue of life. God never places us on the level of a power struggle with those who do not know him.

A Japanese

In February, we welcomed to Taizé for four weeks Kikuro, a Japanese boy of the Shinto tradition. He was traveling in Europe, and in trying to learn more about Christianity, he came to Taizé and in the end decided to stay a longer time. To say thanks for the welcome he received, he wrote a letter before leaving. Here is part of it: "Although I am not a Christian, in Taizé I felt a great sense of unity. I asked myself what gave me that impression. After thinking about it, I would say that it is unwavering faith in the fact that we belong to one and the same family. It is also a feeling of mutual trust and respect for one another, and finally an attitude of modesty to learn from others their way of being and praying. (...) Why is there a diversity of cultures, races and religions in the world? I think that it is because in making us different, God gave us the possibility to cultivate a feeling of mutual respect and trust towards one another. (...) I like this image according to which two people are planting a seed in the earth. If I were Christian, I would describe it in this way: The man on the left is God and the other one is Jesus Christ. God plants a flower and Jesus helps it to grow. Both, God and Jesus, are praying for us that we may have solid roots, beautiful flowers and fruits of peace at all times, even when our hearts are filled with darkness. (...) When I return to Japan, even if my tree is different than yours, I also want it to be solidly rooted in God with fruits of peace for my home, my society and my country. To finish, I would like to offer you my favorite word in Japanese: *'Gokei.'* This word means exactly 'mutual respect.' May God's love and peace reach the ends of your heart and slowly but surely, the ends of the whole world!"

互 Go
敬 Kei

Some questions

to continue reflecting, alone or with others, on the first part of the *Letter from Kolkata*:

- What small signs can we rediscover or invent in our daily life to express that faith is life-giving (blessing children before going to bed or before they leave for school, making the sign of the cross when passing a church, praying before getting in the car and driving somewhere, singing before every meeting, blessing people's homes...)?

- Who are the immigrants in my country that I could visit to show that we all belong to one and the same family? What could I share with them of my faith?

- How can we cultivate the way of being of which Kikuro speaks: an attitude of modesty that enables us to learn from others what they are?

MEETING IN COCHABAMBA, OCTOBER 10-14, 2007

How can we believe in reconciliation in a society in crisis?

A young adult international meeting will be held in Bolivia this year. Roxana expresses what the meeting can mean in the present tense situation of her country.

Can young people believe in a God who can give nothing but love while violence and suffering are unleashed like open wounds, still bleeding? These young people, these families, who have demonstrated in the streets, have experienced interminable nights, constantly awake. The night became darker and darker in a silence that said nothing. The population of El Alto was breathing an atmosphere of uncertainty in October 2003.

What lies hidden behind the protests, the rage and the malaise of a people?

A lack of love? The feeling of powerlessness of those who know that their voice is not listened to?

Many native uprisings against the oppressor have marked the history of Bolivia. With time, these struggles have taken on a social character—for job security, health care, education and, today, to respond to current necessities. The city of El Alto, where migrants come from the countryside, the mines or from other regions, was a master key to the success of the days of October and for the socio-economic and political changes of Bolivia.

You feel the need to approach the hope that God reflects when you share people's suffering, when it becomes part of your life. So it is not surprising that churches remained open for ongoing prayers, that they rang their bells to invite the people of the districts to information and organization meetings and that the church turned out to be a place of friendship for all. During these events, the young organizers discovered the great power of the people, of union, of solidarity and of friendship. We, the young, are the living blood of the Church; our participation and our energy are indispensable.

In 2004, the diocese of El Alto invited the young to prepare "days of reconciliation." They quickly showed how motivated they were by accepting the idea enthusiastically. It was translated into taking an active part in the organization meetings that we put together with the help of a preparation team made up of Taizé brothers and volunteers from Chile and Brazil. Leaders were found; vocations were revealed; youth groups were created; families opened their doors to welcome the young people who arrived.

By simple but powerful acts, a road towards reconciliation was opened: we were building a future of peace.

The days of the meeting arrived and bonds of friendship were formed. Refrains of Taizé translated into Aymara and Quechua were sung out loud and clear. The meeting began with dances typical of the region. During each prayer, a silence—not an empty silence like the one which people feared during the interminable nights of worry, but a silence that said a lot. The prayer around the cross invited us to lay down all that was weighing upon our hearts. During the prayer of light, candles illuminated our joyful faces, happy to believe that a resurrection was possible in our lives.

To close this meeting, the streets of El Alto were invaded by young people whose voices cried out for peace, justice and reconciliation.

In 2005 we held the second days of reconciliation. The participants showed that they could offer their lives to others. Their work and their organization were placed in the service of others. Meeting people who value you and who appreciate you is a joy that gives color to life. Knowing that people are the reflection of God's gifts, you dare to entrust yourself to others. You come to know the trust upon which forgiveness and reconciliation are based.

Those who will take part in the upcoming meeting in Cochabamba in October 2007 will discover picturesque landscapes. They will be plunged into a land that is proud, contentious and happy like its population which, united, is showing strength and courage. As a young person, I have the hope that this meeting will be filled with the light of the risen Christ, that it will witness to the One who animates our heart and who struggles with us, who calls us to love and to offer our life for love, and who brings us joy in this adventure of faith and trust.

BIBLE MEDITATIONS

Jesus Put to the Test

Set between the baptism of Jesus and the beginning of his public life, the account of the temptations occupies a key place in the gospels. Jesus is brought by the Spirit of God into the desert and, after he fasts for forty days (a number that recalls the trials in the past life of God's people), the tempter comes and confronts him. There are almost no descriptive features of this malevolent figure to stimulate our imagination, but instead several names to express the significance of the act: "Tempter" (cause to fall), "Satan" (accuse), "devil" (divide). It is the struggle that Jesus experiences, and not evil in itself, that is the subject of the story.

The tempter puts Jesus to the test in three areas, and attempts each time to deform his relationship with God the Father and with human beings. First of all, he invites Jesus to cope with his hunger all by himself, by turning stones into bread (v. 3). Then he asks him to manipulate God by throwing himself from the pinnacle of the temple so that God can save him (v. 6). Finally, he invites him to enter into the game of domination by offering him power over earthly kingdoms in exchange for his homage (v. 8-9). The reader feels the suspense: if Jesus gives in, he will no longer be the Jesus that we know. But each time the tempter puts him to the test, Jesus responds directly and clearly, simply quoting Scripture passages with which all believers in Israel were familiar.

We could forget that during his life on earth, Jesus had to affirm over and over again the basic orientations of his existence, and to do so through a commitment that asked for everything from him. His ministry was based not on an obligation but on a choice, in other words on love. By his temptations Jesus is thus even closer to us, when we are tested in the basic choices of our life.

- What situations, what choices in my own life do the tempter's questions evoke for me?
- What changes for us when we realize that Christ has already replied to the temptation, and that he remains faithful in his love for God and for humankind?

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:1-11 NIV)

A Message from Heaven

Far away in the wilderness, after having escaped from his brother's anger, Jacob is moved by a dream. He sees angels going up and down on a "staircase". Going up, the angels carry to God the fear, the guilt feelings and the suffering of Jacob. Going down, they bring to Jacob God's presence, God's words and promise (v. 13-15).

What does Jacob discover through his dream? Above all, that God speaks personally to him. Up to that point Jacob did not have any personal experience of God. Earlier, he spoke to his father about "your God", not "my God" (Genesis 27:20).

The dream shows the meaning of the situation Jacob is in. Seen from the outside it is hopeless: Jacob is running away, and he is very afraid. But the dream shows him his circumstances in a different light. Beyond this reality another reality is hidden: God, who accompanies him and who upholds him. Jacob needed the dream in order to recognise this. Mere thinking and reflection would not have been enough. Now he can continue on his way with trust. He is an exile, but not an exile without hope. He is lonely, but not alone. Far from home, he can keep going because of this dream and God's promise. His feelings of fear are no longer the only reality.

For the first time in his life Jacob recognises that he is not the centre of the universe. Jacob did not go up the staircase to heaven. He is a receiver and not an activist like he was before, someone who always wanted to be in control of things.

The dream came to Jacob at a time of crisis. Earlier, when his life went along planned paths, he would not have been so open to God's message. In our life, too, fixed certainties have to be shaken sometimes, so that we can become open for what God wants to say to us. And then we can have the healing experience that we are not the masters of our life.

- Did you ever have something like a meeting with God? Did this happen at a good or bad time in your life?
- Have you experienced situations of uncertainty which were healing for you? Through which you found new trust in God?
- What would you like to be brought up to God along the "staircase"?

When Jacob reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (Genesis 28:11-15 NIV)

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

MAY
DAILY READINGS

1 Is 42:1-4
Tue The Lord says: My servant does not cry out or raise his voice. Faithfully he will present what is just; he will not falter or be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth.

2 Col 3:12-17
Wed Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. The Lord has forgiven you, do the same in your turn.

3 Mt 5:38-42
Thu Jesus said: Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

4 Ws 11:21-26
Fri You are merciful to all, Lord, because you are almighty. You overlook people's sins so that they can repent. Yes, you love everything that exists.

5 Dn 3:41-43 (A:18-20)
Sat We now put all our heart into following you, God, and seeking your face. Rescue us in accordance with your wonderful deeds.

6 Jn 13:31-35
SUN Jesus said: It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

7 Jn 14:15-21
Mon Jesus said: I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor who will stay with you for ever — the Spirit of truth.

8 Mk 3:31-35
Tue Jesus said: Whoever does God's will is a brother, a sister and a mother to me.

9 2 Tm 2:1-7
Wed Paul writes: Draw your strength from the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

10 Ne 8:8-12
Thu Do not be sad or afflicted: God's joy is your 'strength.

11 2 Co 9:6-11
Fri Paul writes: Anyone who sows generously will also reap generously. God loves the one who gives joyfully.

12 1 Jn 4:7-11
Sat Let us love one another, for love is of God and whoever loves is born of God and knows God.

13 Jn 14:19-23
SUN Jesus said: Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and the Father will love them, and we shall come to them and make our home in them.

14 Am 5:4,24
Mon God says: Seek me and you shall live. Let justice flow like water, and righteousness like an unfailing stream.

15 Is 41:8-10
Tue The Lord says to his people: You are my servant, I have chosen you and will not cast you off. Fear not, for I am with you.

16 Rm 15:7-13
Wed Accept one another just as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God.

17 Lk 24:46-53
Thu ASCENSION After Jesus' Ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem full of joy, and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

18 Lk 21:5-19
Fri Jesus said to his disciples: You will be persecuted because of my name. But make up your mind not to worry about how to defend yourselves, for I shall give you words and wisdom.

19 2 Co 4:7-12
Sat We carry the treasure of the light of Christ in earthen vessels so that it may be quite clear that the radiance comes from God, not from us.

20 Jn 17:11-21
SUN Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying: Father, may they all be one, just as you are in me and I am in you, so that they may also be in us and the world may believe that you sent me.

21 Ba 5:1-9
Mon Leave behind your sadness and put on for ever the beauty of God's glory. For the Lord will guide you in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him.

22 Rm 8:18-25
Tue Paul writes: The whole of creation has been groaning as in childbirth up to the present time. And we too groan inwardly as we wait with eagerness for our bodies to be set free.

23 Is 40:29-31
Wed Those who hope in God shall renew their strength. They shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not be tired.

24 2 Co 4:5-7
Thu We do not proclaim ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord. We are your servants for Jesus' sake.

25 Ga 2:19-20
Fri Paul writes: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

26 2 Tm 1:6-18
Sat Paul writes to Timothy: I remind you now to fan into a flame the gift God has placed in you. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of inward strength, of love and of self-control.

27 Jn 20:19-31
SUN PENTECOST The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.

28 Rm 14:13-19
Mon St. Paul writes: The kingdom of God is not a question of exterior rules, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

29 Tt 3:4-7
Tue When the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any righteous things we had done, but because of his merciful love.

30 Is 46:3-5,9
Wed The Lord says to his people: I have carried you since you were conceived. Until your old age I shall be the same, I shall sustain and save you.

31 Rm 12:3-13
Thu Be joyful in your hope, steadfast in hardship, faithful in prayer. Be always ready to offer hospitality.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Christ Jesus, Saviour of every life, you did not come to earth to condemn the world, but so that, by your Holy Spirit, we may live in communion with God.

God of peace, you love and you seek each one of us. You look at every human being with infinite tenderness and deep compassion.

JUNE
DAILY READINGS

1 Hab 2:1-4
Fri I shall stay awake, watching to see what God will say to me. And the Lord answered me saying, "The just will live by their faithfulness."

2 1 Jn 4:16-21
Sat God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

3 Jn 16:12-15
SUN Jesus said: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord but will say only what he has been told.

4 Mk 1:1-15
Mon Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

5 Rv 21:5-7
Tue God says: I am the Beginning and the End. I shall give water from the well of life freely to anyone who is thirsty.

6 Ps 113
Wed God is on high, but bends down to both heaven and earth. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts up the needy.

7 1 Co 11:23-26
Thu Paul writes: I received from the Lord what I passed on to you. Whenever you eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord, you are proclaiming his death until he comes.

8 Dt 15:7-11
Fri Be open-handed towards your neighbour and towards the poor and needy in your land.

9 Jr 31:31-34
Sat The Lord says: I shall put my law deep within them, I shall write it on their hearts. I shall be their God and they will be my people.

10 Jn 6:57-63
SUN Jesus said: The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

11 Ps 34
Mon The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. He saves those whose spirit is crushed.

12 Is 64:3-7
Tue Lord, you come to the help of those who gladly do right. Keeping your ways reminds them of you.

13 1 P 5:1-4
Wed Watch over those who are entrusted to you, not simply as a duty, but willingly and with gladness of heart, according to God's will.

14 Mt 5:1-12
Thu Jesus said: Blessed are you when people falsely say all kinds of things against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

15 Ex 3:1-15
Fri Moses said to God, "If I tell the people: 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am; thus you shall say to them, '«I am» has sent me to you.'"

16 Mt 5:13-16
Sat Jesus said to his disciples: You are the light of the world. A city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden.

17 Lk 7:36-50
SUN Jesus said to a woman, "Your sins are forgiven." Those who were present began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

18 1 S 12:20-24
Mon Adore only God; serve the Lord faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things God has done.

19 Mk 2:13-14
Tue As he was walking along, Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

20 Ps 55:17-19
Wed To God I call and he saves me, evening, morning and at noon. God's peace delivers my soul, for he hears my cry.

21 Mk 4:26-32
Thu Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which is the smallest of seeds, but which, once it is sown, grows into the biggest plant of all.

22 Lk 14:27-33
Fri Jesus said: Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

23 Ga 3:19-29
Sat Paul writes: You have all been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor freeman, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

24 Is 49:1-6
SUN St JOHN THE BAPTIST The Lord says: It is not enough for you to be my servant to restore my people. I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the furthest corners of the earth.

25 Jg 5:31
Mon May those who love you, Lord, be like the sun when it rises in its strength!

26 Jm 1:12-15
Tue James writes: Let no one say when they are tempted, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

27 Mk 2:15-17
Wed Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

28 2 P 1:5-8
Thu Seek perseverance, true devotion, mutual kindness and love. If you live with these things, they will bring you to a real knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

29 Mt 16:13-20
Fri SS PETER AND PAUL Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered, "some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

30 Ps 30
Sat You, Lord, have turned my mourning into dancing. So my heart will sing to you and not be silent. My God, I shall praise you for ever.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

If Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him, why did he keep him in the circle of his close companions until the end?

Among the many disciples who followed him, Jesus designated twelve to be closest to him, to share and continue his mission. He took very seriously the formation of this group of twelve apostles, praying an entire night beforehand.

But at a certain moment, Jesus realized that one of the twelve, Judas, had changed his attitude. Jesus understood that Judas was becoming distant from him, and even saw that he was going to "hand him over," as the gospels put it. According to John's gospel, Jesus understood what was happening already in Galilee, long before the events in Jerusalem that would bring him to the cross (John 6:70-71). Why then did he not send Judas away? Why did he keep him close to him until the end?

One of the words used by Jesus to speak of the creation of the group of the twelve apostles gives us a clue. "Did not I *choose* you, the Twelve?" (John 6:70; see also 13:18.) The verb *to choose* is a key word in Bible history. God *chose* Abraham, and then *chose* Israel to become the *chosen* people. It is God's choice or election that forms God's people, the people of the covenant. What makes the covenant unbreakable is that God chooses to love Abraham and his descendants for ever. The apostle Paul would comment on this: "God's gifts and call are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

Because Jesus chose the twelve just as God chose his people, he could not send Judas away even when he realized that he was going to betray him. He knew that he had to love him to the end, to show that God's choice was irrevocable. The prophets, Hosea and Jeremiah in particular, spoke in the name of a God wounded and humiliated by the betrayals of his people, but who nevertheless never stopped loving them with eternity's love. Jesus did not wish to do less, nor could he do so: humiliated by the treason of one of his closest companions, he kept on showing him his love. By lowering himself before his disciples to wash their feet, he made himself the servant of all, Judas included. And it was particularly with Judas that he shared a peace of bread, a fragment of burning love that the disciple took away with him into his night (John 13:21-30).

If he wanted to be faithful to his Father – to the God who chose Abraham and Israel, to the God of the prophets – Jesus could do nothing else but keep Judas close to him until the end. He loved Judas even when Judas was enshrouded by darkness. "The light shines in the darkness" (John 1:5). The gospel says that Jesus "was glorified" at the moment he gave his love to Judas, when he loved him without gaining anything by it and beyond all measure (John 13:31). In the darkest night of resentment and hatred, Jesus manifested the unbelievable radiance of God's love.

Why are the gospels so discreet concerning Judas' motives?

It is astonishing that the first Christians did not keep silent about the fact that one of the twelve apostles handed Jesus over to the hostile authorities. This fact casts doubt on the character of Jesus himself: did he make a mistake in choosing one of his companions? But it is equally astonishing that the gospels say almost nothing about the motives of Judas. Was he disappointed when he realized that Jesus was not a Messiah with a program of political liberation? Did he think he was acting in the best interests of his people by bringing Jesus' career to an end? Some have supposed that he was motivated by the lure of a reward; others that he acted out of love, to help Jesus to give his life....

In the gospels there are only two indications concerning the reasons for what Judas did. One is the mention of the devil. "The devil placed in Judas' heart the intention to hand him over" (John 13:2). But this only deepens the mystery. The devil, or Satan, is the one who opposes, criticizes or slanders. Jesus sensed the resentment that had come to birth in Judas' heart and that was rooted there to the point of no return. But about why it existed, not a word, not even an allusion.

The other indication is the reference to the Holy Scriptures. Regarding Judas' betrayal of him, Jesus said, "so that the words of Scripture will be fulfilled: The one who eats my bread turned his heel against me" (Psalm 41:10, quoted in John 13:18). It is important to understand correctly the meaning of this reference to the Scriptures in the gospels. They are not a kind of script where the role of each actor is written down in advance. Everyone who reads the Bible carefully knows well to what extent it offers choices and sets everyone before their responsibilities.

Quoting the verse of the psalm "The one who eats my bread turned his heel against me" (Psalm 41:10), Jesus does not mean to state that Judas could not have acted differently, but rather that God remains the principal actor in what is being played out. There is the drama of the betrayal, and at the same time God is the one at work. For if through Judas the Scriptures are being fulfilled, that means that, in a mysterious way, God's intentions are being carried out. God is causing his words to come about (Isaiah 55:10-11). The reference to Scripture enables us to believe in God even during the night, even when what happens is incomprehensible.

If Judas' resentment and hatred remain incomprehensible, Jesus' love "to the very end" is still more beyond all understanding. The gospels are so discreet concerning Judas' motives because they do not want to satisfy our curiosity, but rather to lead us to faith. They do not clarify the abyss of darkness of the drama of Judas; they reveal the unfathomable and incomprehensible depth of God's love.

A PORTRAIT:

Mother Teresa

Brother Roger wrote these lines in homage to Mother Teresa at the time of her beatification, in 2003.

We live in a world where light and darkness coexist. Through the life she lived, Mother Teresa invited people to choose light. In this way she opened a road to holiness for many others. Mother Teresa made words written by Saint Augustine four centuries after Christ comprehensible to us: "Love and say it with your life." Trust in God becomes credible and is communicated above all when it is lived out.

I had many opportunities to converse with Mother Teresa. Often it was possible to discern in her reflections of the holiness of Christ. In the summer of 1976 she came to Taizé. Our hill was full of young people from many different countries. That day we wrote a prayer together: "O God, Father of every human being, you ask us all to bring love where the poor are humiliated, reconciliation where human beings are divided, joy where the Church is shaken. You open this road for us so that we may be ferments of communion throughout the entire human family."

That same year, a few of my brothers and I went to live for a time with the very poor in Calcutta. We were staying near her home in a lower-class district, noisy, full of children, where mostly Muslims lived. We were offered hospitality by a Christian family whose home was in front of an intersection of some small streets, with shops and simple workshops. Mother Teresa often came to pray with us. In the afternoon, she sometimes asked me to go with her to visit lepers who had nothing to look forward to but death. She tried to calm their worries.

At times she could take spontaneous initiatives. One day, after coming back from a visit to some lepers, she said to me in the car, "I have something to ask you. Say yes!" Before giving my reply, I tried to find out more about what she wanted, but she would only repeat, "Say yes!" Finally she explained, "Tell me that from now on you will wear your white robe all day long; this sign is necessary in the situations of our time." "Yes," I answered, "I will speak to my brothers and I will wear it as often as possible." So she had her sisters make a white robe and she herself insisted on sewing part of it.

She was particularly attentive to children. She proposed that I and one of my brothers, who was a physician, go to the home for abandoned children every morning, to take care of those who were most ill. From the first day I discovered a little girl, four months old. I was told that she did not have enough strength to resist the viruses of the winter. And Mother Teresa proposed, "Bring her with you to Taizé; you will be able to take care of her there."

In the plane returning to France, the little girl, named Marie, was not well. When we arrived in Taizé, she began to gurgle like a happy baby for the first time. The first weeks, she often slept in my arms while I worked. Slowly her strength returned. Then she went to live in the village, in a house close to ours. My sister Genevieve, who years before in Taizé had taken in children and raised them as her own, welcomed her to her home. When she was baptized I became her godfather and I love her like a father.

Several years later, Mother Teresa came back to Taizé one Sunday in the autumn. During the prayer, together we expressed a concern that remains true today: "In Calcutta, there are visible homes for the dying. But in many parts of the world, many young people are in invisible homes for the dying. They are marked by broken relationships or by worry for their future. Separations have wounded in them the innocence of childhood or adolescence. In some this leads to disenchantment: what is the good of existing; does life still have any meaning?"

Two of my brothers and I went to Calcutta in order to take part in Mother Teresa's funeral. We wished to thank God for her gift of her life, and to sing with her sisters in the spirit of praise. Next to her body, I remembered all that we had in common, particularly this conviction: a communion in God stimulates us to alleviate human suffering on earth. Yes, when we soothe the trials of others, we encounter Christ. Does he not say it himself: "Whatever you do for the least, you do for me, Christ."

Taizé Day by Day

February in Taizé
is the month of school vacations in France. Many French high-school students came for a week or for a few days. Among others, a diocesan trip from the Morbihan, 100 young people from Toulouse, 150 from the chaplaincies of Seine-Saint-Denis, in the suburbs of Paris. With them, in the heart of the winter, several groups of young Belgians in their last year of secondary school, a coach from Poland, several groups of Koreans, two groups of Czechs, a week with 250 Portuguese, a group from Hong Kong...and many others too.

Some brothers left to prepare
the upcoming stages of the pilgrimage of trust. Two are in **Canada** to prepare the Montreal meeting; two visited the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **Tanzania**, and **Kenya**; one is already in Cochabamba in **Bolivia** for the preparation of the international meeting in October. Two are presently in **Southeast Asia**, after a stop in Kolkata for a prayer of thanksgiving six months after the meeting that brought together 6000 young Asian adults.

Four brothers are living in Stockholm
for several months, in a small provisional community, in order to be a presence of prayer in the city and to prepare for the month of May a young adult meeting for **Sweden** and the **Northern countries**.

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